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UNITED STATES
ADVISORY COMMISSION
ON INFORMATION

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Concluding that "it is time to examine assumptions," the United States Advisory Commission on Information has called for a major review of all information, educational and cultural programs conducted by the United States overseas, and particularly those administered by the U. S. Information Agency (USIA). The recommendation is contained in the Commission's 23d Report to the Congress, released today (March 27) and appearing in the 20th anniversary year of the Smith-Mundt Act (Public Law 402), which provides the legislative base for American overseas public affairs activity.

Object of the review -- which the Commission suggests be conducted under contract by an independent organization outside the government -- would be to answer a number of questions concerning both USIA and the context in which it operates. The Commission poses 11 of its own:

"Is the United States Information Agency to be but an agent of American 'propaganda'? Should it be more than an arm of foreign policy? Are information, educational and cultural objectives compatible within one agency? Were they consolidated outside of the Department of State,

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should that body have Cabinet rank? Or should the reins be drawn together within a restructured Department of State*? Does the responsi-

*The Brookings Institution, in a study ("The Formulation and Administration of United States Foreign Policy") released in 1960, offered the model for a reorganized Department of Foreign Affairs comprising three component departments, each with Cabinet rank: the Department of State, the Department of Foreign Economic Operations and the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs.

bility of those who create the foreign policy of the United States go beyond its declaration? Should they have charge of its promulgation as well? Should USIA have a hand in information dispersal for Government agencies beyond the Department of State? Should it play a role in the influence of policy as well as in its execution? Should it help support those private organizations whose overseas activities had been subsidized covertly in the past by the federal government and whose future funding is under study by a committee chaired by the Secretary of State? Do we really intend that USIA work toward 'mutual understanding'; is it to help us understand them as well as to help them understand us?"

The Commission's recommendation -- under the heading "Twenty Years Later" -- deals not only with USIA's mission but with its own. "We call to the attention of Congress the reality that this Commission, like USIA, is itself 20 years after the fact. The incumbent members feel it timely to suggest that the Congress give similar overview to the role of this body in discharging Congressional intent, and to the question of whether, indeed, it has fulfilled its mission." The report invites "Congressional satisfaction" of that question.

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Included among other principal recommendations of the Advisory Commission's report is a recommendation that the United States' "now fractionalized" public affairs efforts be pulled together into a restructured USIA or a new independent agency. The thrust of this recommendation would be to bring entirely under USIA's wing those educational and cultural exchange programs now administered by the Agency overseas but under policy direction of the Department of State in Washington. Such consolidation, the Commission believes, would end "an anachronism, an anomaly leading to ineffectiveness, excessive bureaucracy and to an unfortunate diminution in funds" existing under present organizational arrangements.

Noting that "the world [has] moved on" since the United States first launched its overseas public affairs programs, the Commission recommends that USIA strike out in "New Directions", -- that its involvement be "less with media and more with audiences, that we be less a spokesman and more a counsellor, less a publicist and more an educator." The report comments upon the increasing sophistication of communications media around the world, and the consequent need to adjust USIA's approach to them and through them to their audiences. "No longer can the U. S. expect communications about itself to be picked up intact or in toto by the media abroad," the Commission says, concluding that a greater reliance must be placed on contact activities with those in overseas communications, academic and cultural circles, and on exchange of persons activities which involve foreign nationals with the U. S. itself.

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The Commission repeats the recommendation of its 22d Report (issued in March 1967) that "the American people have a right to know -- and their government an obligation to tell them -- how the USIA is posturing America before the rest of the world." This recommendation was the subject of hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last year, and of a Senate amendment sponsored by the committee's chairman, Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas. The amendment, which failed of passage, called for a public file of all materials produced by USIA for distribution overseas. This year's Commission recommendation, while again urging passage of such legislation, adds the suggestion that files be maintained at schools of international relations or foreign affairs at selected universities about the United States.

Among the 23d Report's other recommendations are these:

That improved structural liaison be effected with the President and the Department of State to help USIA carry out its foreign policy mission; that USIA reverse its Congressionally-encouraged policy of closing libraries and information centers around the world; that appropriations for educational and cultural exchange activity be matched to the rising needs in these areas, and that representation allowances be increased to make possible the accelerated contact program called for in the Commission's report; that a more ambitious effort be made to coordinate activities with indigenous organizations in foreign countries; that increasing attention be paid to foreign correspondents on assignment in the United States; that USIA make broader use of outside contracts in preparing media materials and in otherwise accomplishing Agency objec-

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tives, and that the House of Representatives act affirmatively on Senate-passed legislation creating a career system for Foreign Service Information Officers.

Copies of the Commission's report may be obtained from the Commission Staff at Room 1008, 1750 Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20547. For further information contact Louis T. Olom, Staff Director. Telephones: DUDley 3-4576, 3-4577, 3-4910.

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The United States Advisory Commission on Information -- a citizens group created by the Congress in 1948, appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate -- conducts a continuing overview of USIA operations, and in its annual report both assesses those operations and proposes recommendations for the future. Its current membership: Frank Stanton (chairman), president of the Columbia Broadcasting System, New York; Sigurd S. Larmon, former chairman and president of Young & Rubicam, New York; M. S. Novik, radio-television consultant, New York; Palmer Hoyt, editor and publisher of The Denver Post, and Thomas Vail, editor and publisher of The Plain Dealer, Cleveland.